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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HONG KONG 002259

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SUBJECT: MACAU EXCO APPOINTMENTS: SAFETY IN THE STATUS QUO

REF: (A) HONG KONG 2171 (B) HONG KONG 1807

Classified By: Acting Consul General Christopher Marut for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Under the somewhat ambiguous banner, "Continuity and Innovation Create Social Harmony" (chuancheng chuangxin gongjian hexie), Chief Executive-designate Fernando Chui Sai-on has opted to stick with the status quo in his Executive Council. Of three new appointments to the ten-member body announced December 1, one is merely a changing of the guard from the major trade union. The remaining two seats went to a popular legislator representing the Fujianese minority and, in the only visible nod to "innovation," a professional architect expected to offer counsel on a number of anticipated development projects. End summary.

¶2. (U) The Executive Council, or ExCo, is an advisory body to the Chief Executive (CE) comprised of seven to eleven members drawn "from among the principal officials of the executive authorities, members of the Legislative Assembly and public figures." Specific terms in the Basic Law are few - ExCo is "an organ for assisting the Chief Executive in policy making" which must meet at least once a month and which must be consulted by the CE on major policies except under emergent circumstances. As in Hong Kong, the CE is not obligated to accept ExCo's advice, although s/he must document the basis on which s/he chose not to do so. Unlike in Hong Kong, where practice has been to include all cabinet-rank officials, only Secretary for Justice and Administration Florinda Chan sits in Macau's ExCo. CE-designate Fernando Chui Sai-on announced his picks December 1, and they will take office with him December 20.

¶3. (C) Of Chui's picks, seven are holdovers from outgoing CE Edmund Ho's business-heavy ExCo. They are:

-- Secretary for Justice and Administration Florinda da Rosa Silva Chan (age 55). Chan is the second-ranked official in the government;

-- Leong Heng-teng, Chairman, General Union for Neighborhood Associations (UGAMM or "Kai Fong") (age 62). Also a member of the PRC Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). Leong chose to retire from the Legislative Assembly (LA) this year in favor of new blood. Kai Fong is the largest of Macau's "traditional associations," providing a range of social services. Observers have suggested its influence is waning -- Kai Fong's joint ticket with the Women's Association returned only one of its candidates in the September LA elections, down from two in the previous LA;

-- Liu Chak-wan, Deputy Chairman, Chinese General Chamber of Commerce (age 59). Also a CPPCC member;

-- Ma Iao-lei, Deputy Chairman, Chinese General Chamber of Commerce (age 61). Also a CPPCC member;

-- Leonel Alves, indirectly elected LA member (professional sector) (age 52). Also a CPPCC member. Lawyer Alves is seen as representing the interests of Macau's mixed-heritage Macanese community, and has advocated stronger links with Portugal in the cultural and legal fields. Other Macanese politicians with whom we have spoken do not necessarily accept him as community leader;

-- Cheang Chi-keong, indirectly elected LA member (industrial/commercial/financial sector) (age 57). Also a member of the Board of Governors of the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce; and

-- Lionel Leong Vai-tac, President, Macau Research Center for Sustainable Development (age 47). Also a National People's Congress (NPC) Deputy and a businessman. Leong, a reputed Edmund Ho protege, has been tipped to us as being a young leader to watch.

14. (C) The new faces include:

-- Chen Man-kam, directly-elected LA member (age 47). Also a CPPCC member. Chan came second in the direct elections only to Macau Federation of Trade Unions (MFTU) grand dame Kwan Tsui-hang. Chan's role as a leader of Macau's sizable Fujianese minority (reckoned as about twenty percent of the population) makes him a smart choice for Chui's ExCo. Chan is also strong among the working class. Chan is reputed to be close to organized crime, a rumor perhaps substantiated in part by his reported sweep of eighty percent of those ballots cast by imprisoned voters (see ref B).

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-- Ms. Ho Sut-heng, President, MFTU (age 50). MFTU traditionally gets an ExCo seat, and Ho took it with the departure of Lam Heong-sang; and

-- Eddie Wong Yue-kai, Chairman, Macau Red Cross (age 57). Also a CPPCC member. Seen as a representative of the professional sector, observers have judged Chui wanted architect Wong's expertise on a number of pending reclamation and development projects.

15. (C) The departed include:

-- Tong Chi-kin, former ExCo spokesman. Newly turned 70, Tong is retiring. ExCo has not yet elected a new spokesman;

-- Ho Iat-seng, NPC Standing Committee (SC) member and freshman indirectly-elected LA member (industrial/commercial/financial sector). With his NPC/SC duties and new role as LA Vice President, Ho told the press he needed to reduce his workload. Once tipped as a potential CE candidate, businessman Ho is a major power-broker in Macau; and

-- Lam Heong-sang, indirectly elected LA member (labor sector). MFTU was smart to spread the wealth: With Lam now in the LA, they do well to add another voice in government through Ho Sut-heng's seat in ExCo.

MARUT